

Simon Payne

**Malcolm Le Grice 'No Idea' Richard Saltoun Gallery, London  
29<sup>th</sup> May-10<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Malcolm Le Grice's recent exhibition at the Richard Saltoun gallery in London included a number of collages and sculptural assemblages; newly configured digital versions of earlier film works; and two new 3D video pieces. Recycling footage has been a central aspect of Le Grice's practice throughout his career, from the optical printing of found and original footage in works such as *Berlin Horse*, through to the reuse of impromptu subjective travelogue material in several digital video works. The show reviewed here only hints at the scope of his output, but the degree to which Le Grice has reworked imagery, strategies and devices comes to the fore.

References to other artists are central in some of the works on show. The early collage, *Lightbulb Assemblage* (1964) is an homage to Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. A set of charcoal drawings entitled *Pablo's Dog* and a self-portrait as a punk-come-demoiselle d'Avignon (1983) are tributes to Picasso. Likewise, the framed collages of a photocopied Mona Lisa, one behind cracked glass (also from the mid 80s), point back to Duchamp. In this case, however, the work also encompasses a reference to Le Grice's own practice, having made the Leonardo image his own in the context of the earlier film-performance piece *After Leonardo* (1972).

The artworks originating in the 60s are informative for anyone wondering where Le Grice's approach to filmmaking sprang from. Two sculptural assemblages, both entitled *Castle* (1964) - one on show here and the other recently exhibited in 'Film in Space' at the Camden Arts Centre - indicate the aesthetic impetus behind the now canonical flashing light bulb film *Castle I* (1966). Both versions of *Castle* involve a light bulb, hung in front of a black and/or white painting, with lines of string connected to other objects on tables or the floor; the work comes off the wall and into space, with light as a mediating factor.

The version of *Castle* on show here was presented as an evolving piece, bringing in reflexive quotations of Le Grice's subsequent work. The original components of the piece (the black painting, the white painting, the string) now come with new fruit and a new branch, unsurprisingly, but also two small nestled video screens: one shows the edited found footage from *Castle I*; the other shows a live feed from a small lens trained on the flashing light bulb hung in front of the paintings. The redistribution of elements from a well-known work amidst two fruit bowls, also containing fake fruit and painted golf balls disguised as fruit, plus the planted postcards of Kafka's house (where he wrote his unfinished novel *The Castle*) are all puns on the artist's keenness to make new work through fresh associations. Brought up to date, the evocation of Johns and Rauschenberg recedes and the reference to Le Grice's own strategies come to the fore, with a sense of humour and irreverence.

*After Leonardo* has had numerous reworkings since 1972. In recent incarnations Le Grice has used video projection, including a live video feed, and he has often performed the piece accompanied by improvised electronics from the musician Keith Rowe. Reworking and recycling is an inherent aesthetic of *After Leonardo*, which is built around multiple reproduced images of the Mona Lisa, and the live feed makes perfect sense, but as installed it loses the element of performance, becoming a little too much like the display of a documented work.

Various of Le Grice's film works for multiple projection have now been remade as digital simulations, as is the case with *Little Dog for Roger*, where the image is duplicated, quadrupled and layered to produce a densely choreographed image. In the filmic version, the sprocket holes of the original 9.5mm film that he appropriated become a graphic motif, made equivalent to the abstracted figures in the image. In the video version the sprocket holes become synecdoches for the wide-screen digital image and its underlying pixels.

Of the new 3D works, *Marking Time* (2015) also involves a reworking of previous material. The colour fields he used in works such as *Matrix* (1973/2006) are orchestrated so as to merge and mix across multiple planes. The three-dimensional effect is more impressive in *Where and When* (2015) because the layered planes are motivated against camera-recorded imagery, which has depth cues already built in. In the opening passage of the piece, footage shot through windows and car windscreens are placed over, behind or against mattes that present other sets of imagery in complex non-integrated fields. Images of the good life abound, as in a number of Le Grice's video works, but he shoots footage on the fly, rather than with calculation, and subsequently works it up in an intuitive and improvisatory manner. In this respect *Where and When* is another of his 'sketches for a sensual philosophy'.

*Where and When* is not in the least bit didactic, as some of his earlier work and theorising might be conceived. Nor is his reworking of older pieces, hence the title of the exhibition 'No Idea'. Likewise, there are humorous 3D juxtapositions throughout the piece: ridiculously protruding palm fronds; underwater footage set against incongruous reflections; chickens scratching around behind a foregrounded fence; sparkling fish scales overlaid with droplets of reflective rain. In contrast to three-dimensional cinema where the aim is verisimilitude or an involving diegetic space, the experience here is one of constant refocusing and an exercising of the eye and mind in looking for associations spatially and symbolically. In contrast to paper collage or sculptural assemblage where there are discrete material layers, in the 3D projection of *Where When* the position of component layers and images are productively ambiguous.